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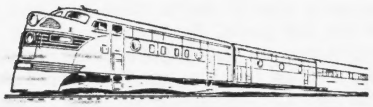
RAIL TRAVEL newsletter



Vol. 2 No. 2
January 17, 1972 #28

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

ON THE COVER: Views of railroading in 1971. (U.L.) Silver BN engines are moved in to couple with the CITY OF SF-DENVER ZEPHYR at Denver. In the background the UP units that brought the CITY from Ogden rest. (U.R.) Bagpiper on the prow, Western Pacific's ferry LAS PLUMAS carries the FLYING SCOTSMAN across the bay to San Francisco on Sept. 29. (L.L.) The first locomotive to receive an Amtrak paint job, Penn Central's E8 unit no. 4316, is seen on the BROADWAY LIMITED in Chicago in October. (L.R.) Where else but on a train? A white boy and a black boy share a travel experience in a dome of the DENVER ZEPHYR. Photos by Message Media.

A BIT of flu "that's been going around" was responsible for the fact that this issue of RTN is a few days late getting to you. Next issue will be dated February 7, January being one of those months with five Mondays. Some of our regular departments do not appear this time, so that we can bring you our annual review and chronology of rail travel events of the past year.

EDITORIAL

Western Rail Service Disintegrating

West Coast Amtrak watchers feel they've just about had it. Last May spirits soared when the new Seattle-San Diego service began. The tri-weekly train has been well patronized, but it appears to be a downhill slide ever since. How long will patrons use the train when service gradually deteriorates? The problems found here are not only with the "try-weakly" COAST STARLIGHT/DAYLIGHT, but with every train on the Southern Pacific system. Let us enumerate some of them:

* Incredibly, the CITY OF SF is now running without a dome, at the height of the scenic snow season.

* The COAST STARLIGHT/DAYLIGHT is now running 1375 miles (between Seattle and Los Angeles) with no lounge car, in direct violation of Sec'y Volpe's directive of Jan. 28, 1971, as required by Public Law 91-518. (A Santa Fe lounge runs between L.A. and San Diego.)

* Dining car service on the STARLIGHT is marred by an expensive menu, poor food selection, lack of linens, and especially by the fact that on the southbound run the last call for dinner comes at 5pm! The diner is closed up long before the train reaches L.A., and travelers to San Diego must either eat dinner in late afternoon (they are not told this when they board) or munch peanuts in the lounge south of L.A., where the diner is removed.

* The already over-long schedule of the STARLIGHT and DAYLIGHT has been lengthened with each new Amtrak timetable publication. Oakland to L.A. takes 10 hrs 10 mins, the reverse 10 hrs 15 mins, which led S.F. Examiner writer Arthur Bloomfield to remark "I can't help wondering why the train isn't more competitive with driving."

* Even this lengthy schedule seems to be managed only on days when the train is nearly empty. During the heavy holiday travel season the train showed an abominable on-time performance. Riders tell about losing time sidetracked for freights.

* The tri-weekly San Diego-Seattle train loses time switching cars at Los Angeles, since SP adamantly refuses to start off the main train there facing backwards and back out of the station onto a wye, as Santa Fe has always done with its SAN DIEGANS.

(continued on page 15)

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Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large
Richard Tower, Research Editor
Steve Farrar, East Coast Representative
Michael Cohen, Artist

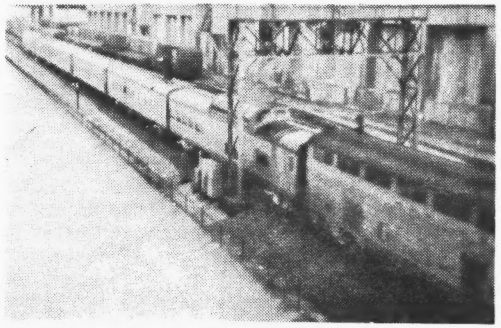
AMTRAK BLAMES RAILROADS FOR POOR SERVICE

Wall Street Journal reporter Albert R. Karr, in an important front-page article Jan. 24, recounted how Amtrak has admitted that train service has been bad and has blamed much of the difficulty on particular railroads that "hamper" the corporation at every turn.

Representative Van Deerlin's celebrated disaster on the SUNSET LIMITED was the source of one of the complaints that led to Amtrak's admission of problems with the carriers. The poor recent on-time performance figures of some roads were cited in the article. An unnamed Amtrak official, indicating that the corporation would demand better performance, was quoted as saying that "We're going to make the Southern Pacific sort of a test case."

The story indicated that many equipment breakdowns occurred because railroads stopped properly maintaining cars and engines when Amtrak was about to start up, since they didn't know which would be purchased.

SNOWBALL SPECIAL TO IDAHO ROLLS



The first Amtrak snow train from L.A. to Boise, Idaho left Jan. 8 with only 78 riders aboard, after being announced only a few days before departure. The unusual consist is seen in the photo by Paul Rayton: Santa Fe high-level coach, UP dome lounge, UP diner, 2 Santa Fe sleepers, UP steam car/dorm, & UP baggage. Three UP engines supplied the power. In the photo it is rolling East alongside the concrete channel of the Los Angeles River.

AMTRAK ISSUES SIMPLIFIED TARIFF BOOK

Amtrak took a first major step toward simplifying rail ticket selling Jan. 6 when it distributed a 309-page book of nationwide fares. No changes of moment in present fares were made, but for the first time ticket sellers and travel agents can refer to just one nationwide reference list and readily find fares between almost any two locations. "Amerail" discounts of 25% for foreigners with valid passports are listed (but do not apply on the METROLINERS, TURBO, or FLORIDA SPECIAL). The book, titled "All America Train Fares, Vol. 1", is dated Jan. 16 and is available to recognized travel agents. In addition, Amtrak announced that travel agents' commissions will now be paid on all portions of the Amtrak system on tickets of $15 or more ($30 for round trip). A new Amtrak purchase order "Form A" was issued for agents to record their commissionable sales. Rio Grande and Southern Railway agreed to use the same commission levels as Amtrak (10% round trip).

SHORT NEWS ITEMS:

Amtrak announced Jan. 18 that J. Richard Tomlinson has been appointed Executive Vice President of the corporation. Tomlinson came from Louis T. Klauder and Associates, Philadelphia, the firm that did the initial examinations of railroads' rolling stock preparatory to Amtrak's purchases. Before that he was Vice President-Finance of the now bankrupt Reading RR...

Congressman Jack Kemp of N.Y. announced this month that he will undertake a searching study of Amtrak to "determine (its) chances of success and survival." Kemp helped initiate the service thru Cleveland that Amtrak has just discontinued, and he was miffed at that cutoff and claimed Amtrak didn't promote or run it properly. He had asked Roger Lewis for a 90-day delay in lopping off the LAKE SHORE, but it wasn't granted...

Chicago will scrap its trackless trolleys, it was announced Jan. 16. The vehicles will go by the end of 1973...

CONVERSATION WITH CONGRESSMAN LIONEL VAN DEERLIN

Paul Rayton talks trains with Representative Van Deerlin of San Diego. Van Deerlin, a member of the House Commerce Committee now considering Amtrak's request for $170 million more funding, got nationwide attention this month after his ill-fated Washington-Los Angeles trip on Amtrak which ended 13 hours behind schedule.

PAUL: What was your experience with trains before Amtrak?

LIONEL: I just had a layman's interest in rail travel. Ever since I was a small child in Oceanside watching passenger trains go thru, it was a kind of romantic thing. From the time I was in the Army until about a year ago, I hadn't had a major train ride except Washington to New York and San Diego to Los Angeles. Two weeks before Amtrak, we came out on the SUPER CHIEF. Since there was a possibility then that that train might be no more, we wanted to ride what is one of the great trains of all time. We've used the METROLINER several times, and of course this is the one big success Amtrak can show.

PAUL: On your recent trip from Washington to Los Angeles, did you notice any differences between the non-Amtrak railroad and the Amtrak road?

LIONEL: Southern Railway was on time. They behaved, with one exception, like a company that might be interested in keeping passenger service. The one notable exception was that they hadn't watered the cars, so that an hour out of Washington it became impossible to flush a toilet or brush your teeth, let alone have a drink of water. We had to wait 3½ hours, until Lynchburg, Va., before we had such a simple service as water. On the other hand, the sleeping car was pleasantly warm. It wasn't until we got on Amtrak's SUNSET LIMITED—and I find it wasn't just the train we were on; I have a letter from a woman who rode the same train two days later--that nobody knew how to operate the heat in the car! So there they were; her husband became so ill from the cold that she had to put him in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles instead of coming on thru to San Diego. He had contracted flu en route. We were luckier--a fellow passenger discovered where the lever was that controlled the heat. The Porter didn't know.

Van Deerlin and copy of RTN

PAUL: Was there any feature of one or the other train that you preferred?

LIONEL: Southern Railway had an excellent dome car. We were up there about sunset on that second day coming into New Orleans.

PAUL: How did you get from L.A. to San Diego, since the SUNSET was 13 hours late?

LIONEL: I had my administrative assistant pick me up. That's sort of cheating, but we would have had to stay overnight, since the train was so late that it missed the last SAN DIEGAN departure.

PAUL: And they didn't hold the SAN DIEGAN for the SUNSET?

LIONEL: No, and I don't think they should have held it that long. There are local riders who want prompt service. If I were commuting from L.A. to San Diego I would be miffed if I had to wait 45 minutes or an hour.

PAUL: And then you wouldn't be sure when you would arrive.

LIONEL: That's right—you never know, and yet somebody must know, but the passengers aren't advised. I was talking with a woman on our train who waited in San Antonio with a small child to board the train. I think we were due in at 2:15am. The station personnel, she said, told her the train was just a couple miles out, just ten minutes down the track, just be patient. And this went on until all the personnel left, leaving her alone. They locked up and went home, and the train finally came in a little after 5:00am. Well, is she going to ride the train again? And somebody must have known we were 3 hours late. We knew it on the train. Whatever became of telegraph service?

PAUL: What element of your trip appealed to you the most?

LIONEL: I like getting away; I love sleeping on a train. I seem to sleep better. I can lie in on a train until 8 or 8:15 in the morning. Just without a care in the world. And I like the absence of telephones even if it would be nice to let people along the route ahead of us know how late we are.

PAUL: In what areas do you think Amtrak needs to concentrate its upgrading efforts?

LIONEL: Goodness knows I'm not an executive type, but I'd assume that the first important thing is to establish authority. It seems to me that what they've got to do is make sure--and my only knowledge is of Southern Pacific now--that the railroads know who is running things. Certainly Amtrak is not running them. The railroads are still running them, and they're running them the way they did before Amtrak. All the employees are not paid by Amtrak, they're paid by the railroads. And "Whose salt I eat, whose song I sing." If Biaggini goes into a national magazine and says that the purpose of Amtrak is to gradually fade away passenger service, that's what all the employees are going to be oriented to doing. Now that's the first thing Amtrak's got to do.

PAUL: Has Amtrak, in its testimony before the Congressional subcommittee, presented any solid front in regard to its money request?

LIONEL: All I know is that Brock Adams of Seattle, who was present at those hearings, told me, comparing something else I was working on then, that if I thought <u>that</u> was a mess, wait till you see what's going on in Amtrak! So I think that their presentation was not very impressive.

PAUL: The ICC report that came out recently mentioned the ability of some railroads to just call up Amtrak and say "Well, our deficit for this month was $67,000," and off goes a check from Amtrak--unaudited.

LIONEL: You've got to be kidding!

PAUL: From your standpoint as a member of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, why does the Washington "machinery" continue to so heavily subsidize highway, air, and even marine transportation at the expense of the railroads?

LIONEL: You know the answer on the Interstate Highway system--this is a self-generating monster. They've got a four-billion dollar surplus now and not a penny of it can be used even for beautification of freeways—it can only be used for concrete. The point has been reached now where rapid transit and alternative transportation methods have got to be funded, and the Highway Trust Fund is the logical place to get the money. An idea is that this is somehow sacrosanct because it comes from taxes on gasoline, tires and buses--so what? My complaint is not how much we've done in the other transportation areas, it's how little we've done to preserve the alternative of rail travel.

PAUL: I'm not saying that we should stop developing the air service...

LIONEL: We should certainly stop building freeways willy-nilly.

PAUL: Everything in its place. I believe that things should be balanced. You should preserve the alternatives because when there's no alternative, then you lose a very fundamental part of flexibility in travel.

LIONEL: Of course the paving contractor thinks that "balance" is 90% freeways and 5% air and 5% rail.

PAUL: There's no reason why contractors can't contract to improve railway roadbed.

LIONEL: Yes—using a different technique. Teaching an old dog new tricks. Which brings us back to our recent trip: on Southern Pacific with their rundown equipment and their rundown

roadbed, something almost has to go wrong. How can it be any other way? We got stopped down for six hours because of a freight breakdown. Well, why was the freight breaking down?

PAUL: Was it a derailment or a breakdown?

LIONEL: Well, this I'm asking. I'm going to ask Amtrak to give me a complete report on that particular trip. But all over Europe it's double trackage, so if there's a problem up ahead, you can go around it. Of course double trackage is expensive, but there's plenty of right-of-way to install double trackage. That may be another thing Amtrak will have to address themselves to if they're really going to save passenger service here. It may take an even greater capital investment than they're asking for. My position is they ought to do it right or not even try.

PAUL: Thank you for speaking with us.

IMPRESSIONS GATHERED ON A HOLIDAY TOUR OF THE NATION VIA AMTRAK

by Richard Tower

CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO is clearly one of Amtrak's best trains--good food, good crew, good equipment, good scenery (in California, anyway), and lots of happy passengers. Could have used snack car for coach passengers, though... PANAMA LIMITED had ten coaches (two with dome), only one sleeper, and a diner-counter-lounge car that was wholly inadequate to serve the more than 500 passengers. Second sections were operating some days Chicago-Carbondale... NATIONAL LIMITED had C&O ex-"Club" series 2DR-kitchen-diner-lounge, UP 10-6 sleeper, UP and PC coaches. Food good, but expensive (coffee 60¢, hamburger $1.75). Cars needed cleaning--UP equipment looked as though it had been running on PC all its life! Train broke in two near Columbus, Ohio (engines and baggage separated from rest of train), rerouted via Philadelphia on Harrisburg-Washington stretch, arrived 3 hrs late... NON-METROLINER Corridor trains unexcelled at cheap, dependable transportation--good, clean equipment, on time--some second and extra sections operating... GENERAL COMMENT on Eastern trains: Turn the heat down in those coaches!... BROADWAY LIMITED running up to 18 cars out of New York--double unit diner, full lounge... ST. LOUIS-MILWAUKEE corridor service a happy surprise--CB&Q dome-parlor-observation, SP, MILW, NP diners, Amtrak really trying here--passenger comments favorable... AMTRAK TICKET office in Chicago Union Station a temporary 6-window structure in middle of waiting room--red-coated clerks working valiantly to serve the flood of passengers. Reservations computer was "down" the day I was there. New concourse should be ready by March... WARNING to Rail Travel Card holders who count on receiving bills two months after trip: Amtrak Chicago ticket offices mail them out the same week!... SUPER CHIEF a little faded--no stationery, frozen orange juice in diner, no stewardess-nurse, but still the best around for my money--crew outstanding... COAST STARLIGHT has one of the most expensive diner menus in the country, yet very limited selection, no linen service--Amtrak vetoed larger, less expensive menu on grounds of higher losses... ALL AROUND the country--crew morale high, but much impatience that more is not being done sooner. Most are looking forward to new uniforms... FINAL OPTIMISTIC note--not once on 8000-mile trip was I aware of taking a siding for a freight.

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Chronology of Rail Events 1971

JANUARY

4 UP combined CITIES train delayed 2 days in record Iowa snowstorm
5 BN NORTH COAST LIMITED derailed near McKenzie, N.D.
17 SP CASCADE derailed near Redding, Calif.
24 LIRR commuter train derailed at Brentwood, N.Y.
28 Volpe announced final Railpax basic network

FEBRUARY

9 L.A. earthquake disrupted San Joaquin Valley service
17 ICC officially defined a commuter train
N.Y. state audit of LIRR fiscal operations released
21 SP rescued motorists from record Southwest snow

MARCH

22 Final NRPC route selections announced
31 U.S. court approved concept of selective strikes against railroads

APRIL

6 Senate appropriations subcommittee faced NRPC incorporators with demands for changes in Railpax system
19 NRPC announced choice of "Amtrak" name and logo
21 Amtrak's first nationwide schedule published
Pres. Nixon nominated 8 Amtrak board members
25 Last pre-Amtrak excursion train on SP
26 Amtrak announced it could not use D&RGW's Zephyr route
28 Amtrak board of directors elected Roger Lewis acting president
30 Last day of operations of many non-Amtrak trains

MAY

1 Amtrak operations began nationwide
5 Roger Lewis elected president of Amtrak
10 Amtrak inaugurated train service thru Cleveland
17 Two-day nationwide rail strike began
19 Railroads elected Menk, Moore, and Quinn to Amtrak board
20 Amtrak inaugurated train service Boston-Washington via Worcester and Springfield

One of the most important rail events of 1971 was the round-the-country tour of Amtrak's TurboTrain (seen here arriving at Oakland the evening of August 25). The tour covered twelve thousand miles, reaching 134 cities in 28 states.

JUNE

10 IC CITY OF NEW ORLEANS wreck killed ten people
Amtrak announced key staff appointments
14 Amtrak revived NORTH COAST LIMITED tri-weekly

JULY

7 PC commuter train derailment in N.Y.C. killed 1 person
9 LIRR collision injured 53 commuters
12 Second Amtrak nationwide timetable became effective; additional service inaugurated
15 Auto-Train Corporation's offering of 700,000 shares of stock sold out at ten dollars in 1½ hours
16 U.T.U. selective strikes against railroads began
900 rescued in N.Y.C. subway fire

AUGUST

2 U.T.U. selective strikes ended
11 TurboTrain tour of nation began
13 GM&O's THE LIMITED derailed near Pontiac, Ill.

SEPTEMBER

3 FLYING SCOTSMAN left Buffalo, N.Y., for Western tour
8 Amtrak announced its initial car purchases from member railroads
9 Completion of TurboTrain nationwide tour
25 First BART stations dedicated in Oakland
29 FLYING SCOTSMAN reached San Francisco to go on exhibit until spring

OCTOBER

26 Senate hearings on additional Amtrak funding began
30 ICC issued report on Amtrak operations

Amtrak
We're making the trains worth traveling again.

NOVEMBER

2 N.Y. voters disapproved $2.5 billion transportation bonds
San Francisco voters approved cable car line extension
First BART accident, with prototype cars
4 ILLINOIS ZEPHYR began operation
9 Atlanta voters approved a rapid transit system
11 Metropark, N.J., station dedicated
14 Third nationwide Amtrak schedule effective: an airline-type schedule with new train names and uniform numbering system; Northeast corridor service upgraded and extended to Boston
23 Reading Railroad filed in bankruptcy

DECEMBER

6 Auto-Train began passenger operations on East Coast
ICC proposed passenger train regulations
9 New Amtrak uniforms and redecorated lounge car displayed
16 BART dedicated new offices and ran prototype train with invited passengers
17 Amtrak began operation of FLORIDA SPECIAL and through Boston-Florida cars
20 ICC issued report on PC bankruptcy
28 ICC approved merger of IC and GM&O railroads

QUOTES OF THE YEAR ***

(Important words from the year 1971)

"It lays the foundation for what in my opinion is destined to become the all-time comeback in the history of American transportation."

—Sec'y Volpe announcing expanded basic rail network, Jan. 28, 1971

"We feel that this network of trains--which has been developed through months of intensive analysis--provides a solid base upon which to build and expand the scope and quality of intercity passenger service. This new system can and will succeed because it unifies for the first time the operation and promotion of the nation's rail passenger service."

—Board chairman David Kendall in introduction to Amtrak's first (May 1) timetable

"We're making the trains worth traveling again. (All we ask from you is a little patience.)"

—From an early Amtrak ad

"Amtrak is a fraud designed for the abolition of the passenger train service in America."

—Ralph Nader, Apr. 28, 1971

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

What can one say about the historic year just ended? An evaluation of the year becomes essentially an evaluation of Amtrak, and we've been trying for nearly a year to capture without success the essence of Amtrak. This is inevitable, for Amtrak is not a static thing, but a living and growing organization.

We've been pleased with Amtrak's accomplishments and impatient with its slowness to accomplish other things. It has a mammoth job to do and insufficient money and personnel to do it with any speed. In spite of the apparent simplicity of its stated aim, to "make the trains worth traveling again," Amtrak's job is far more complex. Amtrak must of necessity possess much inner conflict, since it must serve a number of diverse interests. Its board of directors represents the railroads, labor, and (theoretically) the consumer. There apparently is no other way to operate in our democratic society. Each interest must have its say, and sometimes progress needed for the public good is impossible because an organization gets tied up in knots of conflict.

We hope that's not happening with Amtrak. The trouble has been that over the year 1971 hardly anyone knew just what Amtrak was doing. The organization projected an image of non-communication with the public. And this greatly worried veteran observers of the railroad scene, as they could see Amtrak's few allotted years inexorably running out with no chance that new equipment could be built and tried out to stimulate public acceptance before rail travel would be abandoned entirely.

On the plus side, everyone who personally contacted Amtrak was impressed with the quality of the talent and enthusiasm the corporation possesses. The worry was that Congress and the administration might see Amtrak in a different light and slowly or quickly stifle the corporation by vetoing adequate funds or time to do its work.

One of the biggest notes of optimism is that the times are on Amtrak's side. The nation is reaching the overwhelming realization that our transportation priorities must be revised if the country is to realize ecological survival.

And the new year brings another note of uncertainty. We are in an election year. The candidates and parties will have to take some stand on our domestic transportation problems. And the voters will be assessing candidates partly in terms of these important issues. Amtrak could conceivably see a far-reaching change in its political support. Do stay tuned until next year.

East Coast Report

by Steve Farrar

A DOT-AMTRAK 3-unit TurboTrain made a test run between Washington and Parkersburg, WV, the weekend of Jan. 8. Amtrak is considering placing the Turbo on that route for a 6-month experiment starting in February. This was brought about by pressure from Rep. Harley Staggers, chairman of the House Commerce Committee.

The westbound run left Washington Jan. 8 at 8:15am, stopped at Silver Spring, and stopped at Brunswick, Md., to change crews. All testing was done west of Cumberland to see if the train could successfully negotiate steep grades and sharp curves. A stop was made on the famous 17-mile grade to test starting on two, three and four motors, and to test handbrakes. Tests were made descending Cranberry grade to observe stopping ability without the use of disc brakes. B&O cooperated fully in the operation. Its Engineering Dept. supplied special speed limits so all curves could be negotiated faster than normally allowed. Also, all following freights were kept at least one siding behind to permit the Turbo to reverse and made additional tests if desired.

On the return run Jan. 9, no tests were made. The train left Parkersburg 7:30am and made the best possible time to Washington, making the regular stops of the WEST VIRGINIANS to determine what running times could be used for regular service. The train arrived Washington 2:45pm, cutting 2 hours off the normal schedule. No passengers were carried either day.

As the other Turbo trainset is still being refurbished, the Turbo was returned to New York-Boston service immediately. The morning run from Boston to New York was annulled Jan. 10. The Turbo ran from Washington to New York as an advance section of the 10am train that date, then made its normal afternoon run from N.Y. to Boston.

THE CLOSE of the holidays--Sunday Jan. 2--we had the interesting experience of riding Southern Railway from Asheville, NC, to Lynchburg, VA. The station at Biltmore, 2 miles from the old downtown station, has been relettered "Asheville," and was completely cleaned up and painted about a year ago. The ticket agent was an old pro and very courteous--and he expressed dismay that he no longer could route passengers to points north of Washington.

SR train no. 4 consisted of an F unit and 3 stainless steel cars--the combine "Fort Mitchell," lounge coach, and a carpeted leg-rest dome coach. There were a few grandparents making the one-day round-trip to Salisbury, but the train contributed only 3 passengers to the main-line train, and this was the close of the holidays! We made the spectacular descent from the mountains, spiralling around the same geyser several times. At Old Fort, we took siding for two big freights, which made us 20mins late--but we were 5mins early when we backed into Salisbury. The old station's waiting room floor is gradually falling in, but at least there was heat so that the useless 1hr 25min layover was endurable.

Southern no. 6, the PIEDMONT, pulled in 10mins early, and was led by an Alco RS-3 road-switcher, something we haven't seen in passenger service since SR dropped Richmond service in 1957. There followed 4 F units, the stainless steel combine "Bedford," a grill-coach, a heavyweight coach in IC colors but lettered Southern (apparently ex-Central of Georgia), 2 empty PC mail cars and 3 piggyback flats. The train was almost full leaving Salisbury. At Greensboro the Alco as well as 2 pigs were dropped. Two heavyweight coaches were cut in behind the combine for the 75 or so passengers boarding. One of the cars was a Jim Crow car with a plaque stating "Donated to Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum, Chattanooga, 1968." Readers may wonder

what happened to the streamlined equipment that once ran on the ROYAL PALM, the CRESCENT and the TENNESSEAN. In other words, why are museum pieces in use today? The answer is that the heavyweight cars have just outlasted some early streamlined equipment, which has been plagued with steel struts rusting out under the stainless steel. No. 6 was 15mins late leaving Greensboro, and would have made some time up on the Danville station time, except that all coaches were watered there. We left no. 6 at Lynchburg as about 50 passengers boarded. The train roared off into the darkness and rain about 10mins late, leaving us with mixed emotions about Southern Railway passenger service.

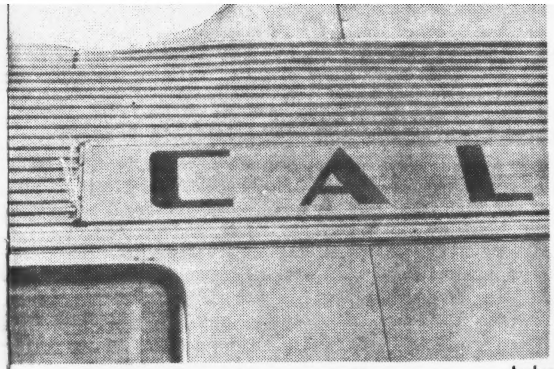
CHICKENBONE SPECIAL was never listed that way in any timetable, but that's what it was called by veteran riders and by railroad employees from president down to carknocker. Despite patronage that was nothing less than phenomenal in the summer and holiday periods, the CHICKENBONE SPECIAL bit the dust on Amtrak Day—May 1, 1971. Officially, the train was the GULF COAST SPECIAL between New York and Jacksonville. It got the nickname because most of its patrons could not afford the diner. They would bring along plenty of Southern fried chicken to eat along the way. Ridership on the trains was about 90% black, and reflected a rural-to-urban migration that has been going on since 1900. Most of the riders have jobs in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia or New York, and they rode the SPECIAL "back home" to the Carolinas and Georgia several times a year. And each June, after high school graduations in the South, new riders would board the SPECIAL and go north to live with relatives and look for a job.

Over the last 4 years of its operation, the train typically had 3 E units, about 10 head-end cars, including the last RPO in the South, 3 to 20 coaches—mostly heavyweight, a sleeper and a heavyweight cafe-lounge. Towards the end the sleeper was dropped, and a streamlined diner replaced the cafe, and streamlined coaches began to appear. But we wonder why patronage had held up so well over the years. The olive drab ACL heavyweight coaches were—after Penn Central—possibly the worst cars in overnight service in the country. They were noisy and rough-riding, and it seemed that the air-conditioning worked only half the time. The bright lights were kept on all night long because ticket checks were made after each city, and because the train porter/news butch worked the train between D.C. and Richmond in the middle of the night. But still they rode, possibly because bus service was worse.

Amtrak at least partially recognized the travel desires of former SPECIAL patrons by running an extra train for them on approximately the old schedule Dec. 23. The train left New York about 9pm for Jacksonville, and ran via Charleston. An extra section of the SILVER STAR had left New York at 8am that day in an effort partially to accommodate the patrons of the PALMLAND, which had been discontinued along with the SPECIAL. The extra section of the STAR ran only as far south as Columbia, SC, and consisted of 8 non-reserved coaches (all full) and a tavern lounge. The regular STAR that day had 5 non-reserved coaches (also full), in addition to its 2 reserved coaches.

Readers may be interested in the 44-page book entitled "The Chickenbone Special," which tells the story of a typical trip from Kingstree, SC, to New York, from a sociologist's viewpoint. The 1970 book is 30¢ from Southern Regional Council, 5 Forsyth St., NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.

ALEXANDRIA, VA, Jan. 17: GEORGE WASHINGTON arrived here 9:30pm last night—8hrs 40mins late, because of steam lines freezing in subzero weather in West Virginia. Steam lines had to be thawed at every division point. The train terminated at D.C. Baltimore passengers were bused on and others put up overnight in hotels at Amtrak's expense. (There were few passengers.)



Now in Chicago being refurbished for AUTO-TRAIN, CZ dome coach "Silver Thistle" sports a weed growing from a dirt-filled crevice as it rests in WP's Oakland yard before moving East.

Northeast Corridor operations NY-DC were disrupted today when PC catenary was snapped by a falling pole under construction, apparently carrying a high-tension line with permission to pass over PC. Operations were expected to resume by mid-afternoon. The northbound SILVER METEOR terminated at DC today. The southbound SILVER STAR was expected here 6hrs late today. SR nos. 5, 7 and 8 were all on time today, as usual. The northbound FLORIDA SPECIAL passed 4½ hrs late today, carrying UP and SP coaches.

Last night (Jan. 16) the southbound SILVER METEOR left DC about 1½ hrs late; the CHAMPION left about 3hrs late; and the SOUTHERN CRESCENT about 2hrs late.

Jan. 18: Today's mixed trains observed at Fairfax station, VA: SR no. 7--3 GP38's, 1 F unit, 1 heavyweight coach (few riders), 3 piggyback flats, 4 box cars, caboose.

SR no. 8—3 GP38's, 1 F unit, 1 heavyweight coach (many passengers—this train usually gets passengers wishing to board Amtrak's GEORGE WASHINGTON (#50) at Charlottesville, because #50 is usually 1-2hrs late), about 20 pig flats, caboose.

MISCELLANY: FLORIDIAN will be rerouted to run via PRR Chicago-Indianapolis via Logansport, in order to use Chicago Union Station and to avoid the Kankakee line slow order... AUTO-TRAIN is now using 11 Car-Port box cars on one trainset and 10 on the other. Southern tri-level racks are on standby only. Kiddie Kars should arrive from Chicago soon. No CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR cars have arrived yet. There are 4 full domes per train now. UP coaches are gone... WASHINGTON Union Station refused to sell me a ticket to Richmond on the FLORIDA SPECIAL. Amtrak thinks that's too short (113 miles)... THE JANUARY Amtrak nationwide schedule has been postponed until LATE JAN. A N.Y.-Washington schedule effective Jan. 13 was issued, mainly to show Metroliner service, since the 5pm northbound Metroliner now reaches NY in time (8 pm) to feed passengers to the New Haven Metroliner that leaves DC at 5:15... Amtrak has issued color folders promoting 1-day tours to Walt Disney World and "Florida Carrousel" escorted tours in conjunction with Greyhound... January 1 sightings in Knoxville, Tennessee, area: At Southern station, 7 L&N "Pine" series sleepers labelled "David Witherspoon," a scrap dealer. The cars were used a year ago on a football special to New Orleans. SR station is still standing because the wrecking bid was too high. At the L&N station, the L&N tavern-lounge CARNIVAL CLUB was on standby power for use as a Boy Scout meeting place. L&N station is to be torn down for an expressway. At Harriman, Tenn., 5 SR heavyweight coaches were at a scrapyard being stripped of windows, plumbing and electricity for excursion use... Thirteen passengers boarded the last westbound LAKE SHORE at Cleveland. Amtrak had moved out of Cleveland Union Terminal 5 days before the last run. The train left from beneath the Detroit-Superior bridge... Apparently there is only one RPO run left—Washington-New York. Three cars leave Washington 10pm weeknights, 1 car weekends...CORRECTIONS: Dec. 20 RTN reported "5 auto-rack cars" on 1st southbd AUTO-TRAIN. This should have read "5 auto-carrying box cars"...Jan. 3 RTN reported "8 Southern Railway auto-carrying...box cars," on the Dec. 17 AUTO-TRAIN. This should have read "8 SR auto rack cars."

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS

NO, VIRGINIA, there is no Santa Claus train anymore from Monterey to Pacific Grove, Calif., since SP says the tracks are inadequate for passenger cars. Perhaps the reason, then, for that luxurious office car "Sunset" set out there at Monterey Jan. 14-16 was so SP Chairman Russell could personally assess their fitness. If so, that's what we call taking risks beyond the call of duty..... COME TO think of it, D. J. Russell has spent much of the month on the rails--six straight days starting Jan. 11--via Amtrak and a special train to Monterey. Strange, in an age when, to quote SP President Biaggini, "the businessman simply cannot afford the time it takes to go by train"..... ILLINOIS CENTRAL Gulf Railroad will officially come into being soon with Alan S. Boyd, now president of IC, as its president, and Glen P. Brock, now president of GL&O, as chairman..... SOUTHERN RAILWAY and Norfolk Southern Railway have reached agreement about merger plans, but ICC and other approvals must come yet..... HARVARD ECONOMIST has singled out Amtrak funding request as illustrative of government cost overruns getting out of hand! Quips Richard Tower: Are we to be classed with Pentagon spenders? If so, we might as well get a couple billion and overrun in style.....

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POLAND IS building a 150mph rail line from Warsaw to Silesia. First portion will be completed in 1975, costing $750 million..... ABSOLUTELY MUST reading for Amtrak watchers: 2-part article on Amtrak by David Butwin in Saturday Review Jan. 15 & 22. Informative, optimistic report with many inside views and quotes from Amtrak. Sample quote: "We'll be getting away from airline food, the reconstituted stuff. If you want lobster thermidor, we'll have it. Or prime ribs, steamboat round roast, good wine, the works." And, from Harold Graham: "I'd like to strip a few cars and make them into rolling hostels with triple-decker bunks so a kid could bring his bedroll and backpack and travel out West. We could feed 'em mess-kit style out of a modified baggage car. They could get off, go biking and hiking for two days, and get back on the train." Right on, Harold, let's do it!..... TWENTY YEARS ago on Jan. 13 the westbound CITY OF SF became marooned in heavy snow near Norden, Calif. for 3 days. On that anniversary a tri-weekly CITY passed over the spot without incident. The big news about the train around then was that SCL equipment was starting to appear on it. SCL diners (with coal-fired stoves which puzzled the crew until they discovered Pres-to-logs), and a round-end SCL observation car (which unfortunately brought the dome lounge off, however) have appeared. Full story of the snow-bound train is in the Howell-North book "Snowplow"..... HEAVY SNOW in Eastern British Columbia Jan. 21 caused closing of both CN's and CP's routes from Vancouver. 600 passengers on 2 westbound and one eastbound CP CANADIAN had trips delayed...

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SUPER CHIEF/EL CAPITAN has had a reprieve from loss of one diner. Seems the train couldn't charge its extra fare without the separate first class service. We opened an envelope from Paul Rayton to find a paper napkin with a red-white-and-blue Amtrak emblem printed on it, and this message scribbled on the reverse: "After 9 months of operations, here is the first substantial change in the EL CAP dining car. It takes 9 months to print up paper napkins?" They made their debut in L.A. Jan. 19 but probably left Chicago the 17th..... THE FIRST L.A.-Las Vegas Fun Train has been postponed until Feb. 4. There will be 9 experimental package weekends, leaving L.A. 4pm Fridays and returning Sundays. Not decided yet whether they will take the UP or Santa Fe thru San Bernardino..... ROTARY CLUB special train on SP from Oakland to Reno left Jan. 23, returned the 24th. Had 19 cars, including four 10200-series diners, 2 flattop- and 1 dome-lounge, and 5 pairs of articulated coaches..... SP dining car crews have sent Amtrak their measurements for new uniforms. They received samples of plasticware to be used soon in their diners.....

(continued from page 2)

* SP maintains that no domes except the old dome lounges (of which it owns 5 that Amtrak wouldn't buy) can negotiate the Overland and Cascade routes without special train orders to keep passing trains clear where tracks curve close together. Even a former C&O dome built for low clearances supposedly failed SP's lean and roll tests, and the railroad adamantly refuses to run passenger trains on special train orders, as they did when the former CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR needed re-routing or when high auto-rack cars are moved.

* SP will not run Santa Fe high-level cars on the SUNSET LIMITED until Amtrak pays for costly alterations at one point on the route to allow clearances.

* The SUNSET LIMITED's on-time performance record over the holidays was nearly as bad as that of the STARLIGHT, and other complaints have been voiced (see the interview with Rep. Van Deerlin in this issue).

* Finally, the last straw: the daily through service to San Diego Amtrak announced in ads in early November was quietly dropped Jan. 10. Worse, the through cars of the tri-weekly STARLIGHT/DAYLIGHT will be eliminated as soon as present reservations are used up. The traveler to San Diego from North must now change trains in L.A. This will rule out, for one thing, travel with pets south of L.A. Because of the poor time-keeping and switching problems at L.A., the Seattle-San Diego thru service begun May 1 has been destroyed. Unable to repair it, Amtrak is helplessly abandoning it.

The Amtrak watcher asks: who's in charge here? Granted that Amtrak has had to concentrate its efforts in the East because its limited resources won't allow it to do everything at once. It is said to be going to work on the West "next," whenever that is. But why is Amtrak content with asking Congress for only $170 million when it clearly lacks the money and manpower to change and control the rail passenger system the law requires it to oversee?

It's clear that so far the railroads in the West have been dictating terms to Amtrak rather than accepting its requirements in return for having been relieved of responsibility for passenger operations. It may be up to Congress to force Amtrak to clamp down and make the railroads behave, in the public interest.

LETTERS

I can only concur with all that's been written to you and published in RTN's letter department.

Excellent, timely, informative publication. There is nothing in your format that would seem to cry for change or improvement. Thank you for perfection.

George Muench

Campbell, Calif.

I have observed in recent days that the Amtrak trains operated on the Chicago-Carbondale-New Orleans mainline of the Illinois Central are no longer being washed. I observed the PANAMA LIMITED southbound Jan. 10 at Mattoon. It was on time but was quite filthy in appearance. The next day I observed the southbound SHAWNEE on time approaching Mattoon. It had a consist of a coach, lounge car and second coach. All three cars had clearly not been washed in some time and were quite filthy.

Perhaps Amtrak no longer has funds to clean exteriors of cars.

Richard F. Record Jr.

Mattoon, Ill.